

Former CIA director covers arms scandal during speech at V-I

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A former director of the Central Intelligence Agency said the Iran-Contra scandal resulted from a "massive exercise in bad judgment," and proper use of intelligence resources could have prevented the situation.

William Colby, CIA Director under presidents Nixon and Ford, believes, however, reaction to the Iranian arms scandal will close "loopholes" in America's current intelligence system. Colby spoke at Virginia Intermont College Thursday night as part of the school's Leonard Hall Memorial Lecture Series.

Though he feels the Iran-Contra scandal hurt President Reagan's effectiveness as a leader, Colby does not feel fallout from the Congressional recommendations will seriously hamper the country's intelligence capabilities. The situation could have been avoided entirely if the proper people had run the operation, Colby said, referring to the roles of Lt. Col. Oliver North and others from outside the intelligence community.

"If you're going to run an operation of that magnitude, you have to rely on professional people," Colby said, "not dependent on an enthusiastic group of amateurs."

Colby knows well the world of professional intelligence gathering. He began his career in intelligence during World War II in the Office of Strategic Services, the CIA's predecessor. In the 1950s, he joined the fledgling CIA, eventually becoming Chief of the Far East Division. He was named CIA Director by President Nixon in 1973, and served in that capacity under President Ford until 1976.

When he was appointed to the post, Colby was described by U.S. News and World Report as the "professional's professional."

The business of intelligence gathering has gone through a number of changes since the CIA's inception, Colby said. One of the major changes was this country's decision to make the CIA answerable to the Constitution, he said.

"We believed American intelligence must operate under American law. That was a very novel idea because, for many years, it was thought the intelligence had to operate outside the law."

This legal measuring stick was violated when North, late CIA Director William Casey and others in the intelligence community initiated the Iranian arms deals and began funneling profits from those deals to the Nicaraguan Contras, he said. In doing so, they withheld information from Congress and stepped outside the law, Colby said.

But Colby believes the recent report from the Iran-Contra commission will result in only minor modifications of our intelligence system.

"It's like our tax structure. There are loopholes. When you find a loophole, you fill it in. Congress will just fill in some loopholes in the intelligence system."

Despite the cloak-and-dagger image of the CIA, the agency puts much less emphasis on espionage these days, Colby said. Instead, more resources go to the collection and analysis of data and information. Technology and science have revolutionized the intelligence business, he said.

One example is the development of "spy planes" that can conduct photographic surveillance. Such plans were vital in uncovering the installment of Soviet missile bases in Cuba, and the subsequent removal of those bases, he said.

He added, however, that spies still have their uses in intelligence gathering, such as in explaining why Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev disappeared for 56 days last summer. Colby does not

believe various Soviet explanations, including one that said Gorbachev was just vacationing with his family.

"There is an explanation there that you won't see in the satellite cameras, and you won't see in electronics. You need a good traditional spy to find out why."

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